



Florida House of Representatives
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WILL NEW GAMBLING REVENUES HELP SCHOOLS?

TALLAHASSEE, FL --- Are Republican legislative leaders breaking Governor Charlie Crist's promise to Florida's schoolchildren?

Republicans in the Florida Legislature have unveiled budget work papers that show intent to steer new state revenues from a proposed Seminole Gaming Compact into the state's drained savings accounts rather than committing the new gambling revenues to Florida schools.

For several years, Governor Charlie Crist has repeatedly said that public schools, students and teachers should be the primary beneficiaries of any expansion of gambling under the gaming compact that has been negotiated with the Seminole Tribe of Florida and is awaiting approval from the Legislature.

But in sharp contrast to the governor's statements, the Republican-led House and Senate are nearing agreement on a state budget that, under current plans, fails to dedicate new gaming revenues to public education.

Budget work papers released late Tuesday show that any state revenues from the gaming compact would be diverted into Working Capital and Budget Stabilization funds---not to Florida's education funding formula.

The strategy appears to be designed to keep Republican members who oppose gambling from voting against education, where new gaming monies should be dedicated. Florida House Democrats are urging Republican leaders to ensure that new gaming revenues are utilized to enhance Florida's schools.

"It's a disgrace that Republican leaders are playing a bait-and-switch trick with the public when it comes to Florida school funding," said House Democratic Leader Franklin Sands, D-Weston. "The public has been told repeatedly by the governor and others that they can expect new gaming compact revenues to go to education."

Representative Martin Kiar (D-Davie), the Democratic Ranking Member on the House PreK-12 Education Appropriations Committee, issued the following statement:

"Republican leaders promised the people of Florida that any new revenues from the Seminole Gaming Compact would go directly to education. Now, for political reasons, they appear to be breaking Governor Charlie Crist's pledge to Florida's schoolchildren and educators. This is shameful because the only reason many people support an expansion of gambling is because they are told it will help Florida's education system."

The following are a few of the statements by Governor Charlie Crist about how Seminole Gaming Compact revenues should be spent:

"These much-needed funds will improve the quality of life of students, teachers, and all Floridians for generations to come."

- Governor Charlie Crist, Office of the Governor Press Release, April 3, 2009.

"I am grateful to the Tribe for their desire to contribute even more – \$600 million alone for budget year 2009-2010 – to maintaining a quality education for our children."

- Governor Charlie Crist, April 22, 2009.

"While it is the Legislature's prerogative to appropriate the funds as they see fit, I believe that best use of the funds will be to enhance education. The compact will provide much needed revenue that can help us develop world-class schools throughout the state."

- Governor Charlie Crist, Office of the Governor Press Release, Nov. 14, 2007.

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